



Sermon – May 10, 2020
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Verses Covered This Week

Ephesians 6:1 – 4

Romans 1:29 – 31

Ephesians 5:29

As you grab your seats, let's grab our Bibles. We're going to spend our time in Ephesians chapter 6 this morning. Ephesians 6 beginning in verse 1. And if you're joining us from your living room, it's going to feel a little bit different this morning. I won't just be looking at the camera; I'll also be looking around the room. Because for the first time since the shutdown, we have some people here. If you're excited to be back, will you let us know that? Well we're thrilled to have this pilot group with us. What we've asked this week is for some of our key volunteers and leaders, our greeters and ushers, to come back and get trained on what life is going to be like in this new normal as we begin to welcome others back in the weeks ahead. And what we're going to spend our time doing this morning is picking up in the book of Ephesians. As we talked about in this pastoral transition, what we're doing here is not taking the church in a new direction, but in a next chapter. And it seemed fitting that one way to symbolize that would be to go on into the next chapter of the book of Ephesians to continue the study that we've been faithfully marching through as a church in the last few years. And so, we're going to draw your attention to Ephesians 6 this morning. But as we do that, what a joyful and encouraging week we've had here with the church. We got a chance last Sunday after the service to connect with our Special Needs adults in the Sunday Mix on Zoom. I saw many of your smiling faces gathered here on Thursday night for our national day of prayer time. And Wes and I got to join together to commission some of our college graduates who are heading off into the real world. We're seeing the Lord at work even in this unusual time. And let's turn our attention now to the word so that the Lord can do a work in our hearts as well this morning.

Follow along with me in Ephesians 6 in verse 1. Paul says,

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³“that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we're coming to You now, in this moment as we seek to engage with Your word, we pray that You would open up our hearts to You, Lord. That Your Spirit would work among us and that You would shape our lives and shape our homes to better reflect the picture of the gospel that You've given us in Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, one of the things I know is true for me, and I'm sure it is for you during this Coronavirus slowdown, as we're starting to notice things that we would not typically notice before. And so I've setup a makeshift office in my parent's house that has a great view out into a courtyard, and I can look out the window. One of the things I noticed in the first couple of weeks we were here is that there were two house finches that began to build a nest right outside of that window. And they spent day after day foraging for twigs that they could build the nest. And then it seemed not long after that, they began to build their family by laying some eggs. And there's been some interesting moments over the last few weeks right outside my window as this is taking place. Because there have been other birds and animals that have tried to take over that nest from them. And they've had to protect their home from the invasion of others. They've had to seek to store up food for the expectation that these eggs would soon hatch. And they would need to provide for their young. That sense of protection and provision are central to the life of a bird family that is raising those that are young in its nest. And that's true not just for the animal kingdom. That's also a reality for us as we are raising families in our own homes. That when we see the Scripture laying things out, there is this idea of both protection and provision that is to mark the home. And that's precisely what Paul is speaking of here in Ephesians 6 this morning. And so, whether you are one with an empty nest right now or your nest is more full than you would care to realize as everybody is spending 24 hours a day together in your house. Whatever situation you find yourself in, Paul is going to give us a picture this morning of what the Christian home should look like.

Well it's fitting that we pick up in this study of Ephesians in this passage on Mother's Day as he is giving us God's design for the home. But I know in a situation like this, not every one of you is raising a family at your home. In fact, some of you may be empty nesters and you've got a prodigal son or daughter who you everyday wake up and you look off to a far country to wait to see if they're coming back home. Or maybe you grew up in a broken home where this picture that Paul is laying out here in Ephesians 6 doesn't match the reality that you experience. Or perhaps you're one of those that we prayed for earlier today when Bill prayed for those of you wrestling with infertility and a longing for motherhood. Regardless of what family situation we find ourselves in, Paul is showing us what God's design for the home is intended to look like. And let's think about what's happening here. Because he's writing to the Ephesian church from prison. And he is giving them this letter with instructions about how they are to live the Christian life. We know at the end of chapter 5, he has walked them through what marriage is intended to look like in a reflection to the gospel. And now as he turns his attention to Ephesians 6, what he's going to do is lay out for us what the family life should look like as the gospel shapes our other relationships. And what we're going to recognize this morning is that Paul is answering the question, "What does it look like for Christian families to thrive?" And what we're going to notice this morning as we look at this text, is he's going to give us two key things that every Christian family needs in order to thrive. One for the children and one for the parents.

So look back at verses one through three with me here as we begin our time together. What we're going to notice first is that Christian families thrive when children respect their parents' leadership. Do you see the way it begins there? It says, "Children, obey your parents." So imagine, you're gathered around the Ephesian church, maybe you're a young child sitting in the lap of your mother. You have the Apostle Paul writing this letter to give you instruction. And then all of a sudden, at the end of it, you hear him address you as children in particular. You would see those children light up and perk up and become interested in what he has to tell them. And what Paul lays on them is two instructions for how children should function in the home. First, that they're to obey their parents. And second, that they are to honor father and mother. So it's not an accident that I made sure that my boys were in the room when we were preaching this morning. Because I want them to uniquely understand this just like we do in your own homes. There's this idea there of obeying your parents.

And what does that look like? What does Paul have in mind? It's a sense of respect for their leadership so that you will respond to their authority. Maybe a better way to say it is, that children should be wired to trust and to follow the commands of the home and to follow through with the commitments that are made. There's a sense of obedience that's there. I remember when we were raising our first kids while we were still in Louisville. We lived not far from Target. And one day our oldest son, when he was two-years-old, decided that he didn't want to wait around to have to go with mom to the store. He just wanted to go on his own. And so he packed up his stuff and decided he was going to head out the back door and start walking down the road. Even though we tried to stop him and told him not to. We thought, "Oh, he's just messing around. He'll walk to the edge of the grass and he'll come back." And sure enough we let him go for a while and he rounded the corner and we thought, "OK. Maybe this is more serious that we actually realized." And we had to go and rescue that two-year-old and bring him back. Nobody has to educate a two-year-old in what it looks like to disobey. Nobody has to coach a child on how to make poor choices. Now in that time, it was just the two-year-old having a good time. But in other situations in our home, we see that tendency for the curse of sin to take root in our hearts, don't we? Where we find ourselves resisting authority, rejecting leadership, rather than responding to authority and respecting leadership. But Paul gives us a picture here of the significance of disobedience to parents. If you've got your Bibles handy, flip back to Romans chapter 1. Hold your place here in Ephesians 6 because we'll come back to it. But in Romans 1, Paul is talking about those who are fallen, who have turned away from God. And he gives us this big list of sins and I want you to notice what one of them is that he mentions there beginning in Romans 1 in verse 29. He says this:

²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

So Paul is marking out the characteristics of fallen man. And it's like he's giving this laundry list of felony offenses against God. And it seems like tucked in there right in the middle of this list of felonies is a misdemeanor. Those that dishonor their parents. Like how do you equate that with some of the other things that are there? But why does he have that here in this text? It's because someone who struggles to obey their parents is someone who's going to struggle to obey God. Someone who's wired to dishonor their earthly father, is going to be wired to

dishonor their Heavenly Father. There is great significance at stake, children, in this command that Paul is laying out here; to obey your parents. Now that raises the question, though. Are children always expected to obey? What if they have unbelieving parents? What if they are being asked to do things that they know would be sin and dishonoring to God? The primary disposition of the home should be towards obedience. But there are rare exceptions. If a parent asks of you as a child to do something that would cause you to disobey God, it'd be better to disobey your parents than to disobey God. It would be better to honor God and bring dishonor to your parents in those moments. But those instances are exceedingly rare. What's more common is that we know what we ought to do and yet we do not do it. And for parents, one of the dangers that we can create in the home as we seek to foster families full of obedience, is that we can turn obedience into legalism. You know the difference between those? Legalism is when you're more concerned with what your children do than why they do it. When you're more concerned with the works of their hands than the work of their heart, Paul is addressing both of those. And so when our four boys, when our home is at its best, one of the things you will regularly hear our family talk about is the need for our boys to have what we call a happy heart. That we're not just interested in begrudging obedience to the commands that we give in our home, we want their lives to be marked by a joyful spirit that responds to the authority of their parents and respects their leadership in a way that causes them to do exactly what Paul is speaking of here to obey their parents.

But that's just the first thing he tells children to do. Look back at verse 2. He also tells them to honor father and mother. Now for those that are hearing this, this would be familiar words to them. They knew their Old Testament. They knew this was laid out in Exodus 20 and reaffirmed in Deuteronomy 5. For us who have the New Testament, we know that this command is rehearsed at least five other times in the New Testament. There's this idea of honoring. And of the questions we should be wrestling this morning with is, what's the difference between obeying your parents and honoring your parents. Well it seems like the distinction that Paul is marking for us here is that obedience focuses on actions; honoring focuses on attitude. Obedience focuses on what we do, but honoring focuses on why and how we do it. There's this calling there to honor parents. In that time period, the father of a home would have authority over his offspring. Not just for the period of time that they were in the home, but in a sense, for their entire lifetime. There was not transition at which they no longer were expected to obey their father. But in our culture, in our time period, we know that that transition out of the home often happens around when people go off to school or go off to work. They get married. There's a sense of transition that happens where perhaps this call to obey your parents may stop at some point when you're no longer living in the home. But this expectation to honor your parents never ceases. It is always there. There is always this expectation to honor parents, even until their dying days. Now I know during Coronavirus, there may be more multi-generational families right now. So for us, we've got our kids and us living with their grandparents. And just this past year, two of my grandparents passed away. C. O. and Martha Smith were long time members of this church. They weren't around as much in the last few years because they were shut-in. I just have to tell you, I watched my mom honor her parents until their dying day. I watched the way she cared for them. She loved them. She invested in them. And even though that she was no longer a child under the same roof as them in their home, she did what she could to care well for them. And I trust that each one of you understand that this call to honor your parents is something that continues until their dying days. That's what Paul is laying out for us here.

But I want you to notice, kids, that when he lays out these commands to you to obey your parents and to honor them, he doesn't just give you regulations. He gives you reasons. Look back at the way that verse one through three lays out for us three reasons why parents should be seeking to respect the leadership of their children. You'll notice the first one back in verse one. He says, "For this is right." In other words, respecting the leadership of your parents is good. It's written on your hearts. It's part of the fabric of the way that God created the world. There are certain realities that reflect the design of God's creation. The sky is blue. The sun comes up in the east. You wake up and there's dew on the ground. The Longhorn football team under-performs their preseason ranking. There are just certain things that are baked into the reality of the way the world works. You can count on them year after year, moment after moment, across cultures, across generations. And one of those is this idea that children should respect the leadership of their parents, for this is right. Now we know the curse of sin has corrupted the family. And so what that means is for us in our home that we are nothing more than sinners helping sinners stumble towards Christ-likeness as we seek to follow after God. But part of what that means for us is that we want to help our children cultivate a respect for leadership in the home by helping them cultivate it beyond the home. That's one of the reasons why when your kids are involved here in Central Sports that they're going to learn how to respect their coach. That's when they're gathered in a gospel project group on a Sunday morning or a Zeal group on Sunday night. They are going to learn to respect their teachers because that respect for leadership in every aspect of life will help them to reflect it in the home as Paul speaks of here.

But that's one reason is that is wired into the fabric of the way that God's designed the world; it is right. But also notice back in verse 2. A second reason Paul gives for children to respect their parents. And it's this: that the leadership of your parents is true. In other words, it's written in the law. He speaks there in verse 2 that this is the first commandment with a promise. God didn't just design this for the world, He designed it for His people. He wrote it in the law. There's this promise that they will, that things will go well for them, that they will live long in the land. Israel was given this promise that if they obeyed God's commands, there would be blessing. And we look back at this call to honor father and mother and we can look at page after page after page in the Old Testament where Israel falls short of this design. But the broken homes you see in the Old Testament don't stop there. We can see those same types of broken homes even in our culture today. Where we see fatherless children. We see domestic violence. We see a difficult custody battles. We see abuse taking place. There are all of these ways that the family can be fractured that come back to the heart of sinful humanity turning away from God's design for our lives. But what we need to recognize is that if you are children seeking to follow after God, there's one more reason that Paul leaves us here in back in verse one about why you are to do it. When he tells us that children should respect the leadership of your parents because it's beautiful. It is a reflection of a gospel picture. Do you see it back in verse one? He says, "Obey your parents in the Lord." That word, that phrase, in the Lord is one he repeatedly uses in the book of Ephesians as a point of emphasis. What does it mean? What Paul is doing there is he's showing us that whatever aspect of life he is talking about, there is a unique gospel grounds for why it is we should do it and how it is that we should carry it out. And so I can think about a friend of mine who is raising an adopted son. And I remember him telling me that once they brought him back home, he would get up every morning, the father would, and he would go down to his son's room and by the time he woke up, the son's room was spotless. The bed was perfectly made. He was effusively ready to obey. And at first the dad was touched by this. He

thought it was so great that his son would want to be an honor to his parents and to live in a way that the family designed him to live. Until he realized that the son was trying to earn his way into the family through his behavior. That he was trying to prove he had a place at the table through his obedience. He had inverted the picture of the family that Paul had given us here. And what that father had to help him learn is the same thing we need to help each one of our children learn. That the call to obedience isn't so that you can earn your place into your family, but to reflect the reality that you are a part of the family. And when we help them learn that in our own homes, perhaps it will help them learn that reality about their Heavenly Father. That there is nothing that a child or any one of us can do to earn our place at the table with God. There is no amount of obedience that will enable us to be made sons or daughters. Because we all fall short in our pursuit of obedience. But Paul is showing us a different picture here. One where the striving should be to reflect our pursuit of God in the Lord through the way that we obey our parents.

But lest we think that Paul only has a word for children this morning, notice with me the way that this text closes down in verse four. We see a second big idea here for how families should thrive. And Paul teaches us in verse four that:

[4Fathers, do not provoke your child to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.](#)

So the second thing we see here is that Christian families thrive when parents reflect their Heavenly Father. So Paul is speaking there specifically to fathers in this moment. He is giving them instruction. Why? Because in that culture and at that time period, fathers were responsible for the education and upbringing of the family. And he knows if he speaks to fathers there's a sense in which he's speaking to the whole family. He's addressing both fathers and mothers collectively. And what Paul instructs them to do is to raise their kids in a way that reflects their Heavenly Father. Do you see the way it lays out there? He says that it's going to show up in two different ways. And the first one right there at the beginning of verse four is that they will not provoke their children to anger. So he speaks there of ways that we might intentionally exasperate our kids. To bring frustration into their lives on purpose. So we know that the phrase, you know, don't push his buttons, or let a sleeping dog lie, or if you mess with the bull you get the horns. We understand this mentality of intentional provocation. And Paul is warning parents against that. Now look, he's not saying there's never a time where your children are going to be angry or upset with you if you do things right. He's saying instead, you should not be the intentional cause of that. And what I've noticed, if you think about how that may show up in the Christian home, is that parents might provoke their children to be upset or angry in any number of ways. Perhaps through harshness or sarcasm. Maybe when they're unfair to their children. Maybe when they're overly critical. But if I had to guess what the most common way that we exasperate our children is, it's through digital distraction. When we more often are looking at our phone than at the eyes of our child. When they feel like they have to compete against the screen for your attention and engagement. And that's true because they might feel as if they have to compete. But also whenever you're distracted, there can be a tendency to see whatever they do as something that is different than you would have thought it to be had you been fully engaged in paying attention. And whatever way we might be prone to exasperate our children, Paul is calling us to step away from that, to resist that, that instead of intentionally upsetting them, we should be seeking to intentionally invest in them. And that's exactly the

picture that we had laid out here in the second half of verse 4 when Paul gives parents a second instruction. What does he say? Look at the verse. He says:

bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

In the original language, this word bring them up was the word to raise or to nurture, to nourish. So if you flip back one chapter in your Bible to Ephesians 5, you'll see when Paul is writing about marriage in verse 29. Look at the way he uses that exact same word there. He says:

²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church.

So in other words, Paul is showing us just as Christ feeds the church, we are called to feed our families. Just as he seeks to bring up the church and raise them up in a way that seeks to honor God, so too should parents do that in their own home. And that plays out in a couple of different ways. One is through discipline. And when you read that word discipline, your first thought is going to be to think of physical punishment or consequences. But more accurately, this word is an all-encompassing concept for training. So right now if we weren't in a Coronavirus shutdown, there would be final preparations going on for the summer Olympics. You think about stars of Olympics past like a Michael Phelps and others who spend countless hours training, preparing, getting ready for the task that has been laid out with them. That's the sense of picture that Paul gives here of discipline. It involves both correction and direction. It is both reactive and proactive. It is for a purpose in the same way those Olympians are training to excel in the race that is before them, we are seeking to come along side our children. Raise them in such a way that they are trained for the life that God has called them to. That's the picture that Paul is laying out for us about discipline.

But it's not just discipline there. He speaks of instruction in the Lord. What does he have in mind? What he's showing us is that we need to be the type of families where we're seeking to help our children apply the gospel to every aspect of their life. To help them see how the Bible fits in to every dimension. Every family's known for something. One of the things I've learned in the last few weeks is that Stephen Hokenson and his family are known for media and technology. He's got like his sons running cameras and doing all these amazing things. Maybe you're a sports family. Maybe you're a school family. There are certain things that define who you are that are at the center of what you're doing to invest your time to shape your children. And what Paul is calling us to this morning is that the center of our families should be instruction in the Lord. That Christ should be at the heart of all that we do, at all that we invest in. Of course that means we need to be intentional in family devotions. On some of the Zoom calls that we did with y'all over the last few weeks, one of the things we talked about with family devotions is that when we do it with four boys, it feels like it's one part Bible study, one part comedy routine, and one part WWE wrestling match. And there are times when we wrap up that time where I look at Cami after the boys are in bed and say, "What just happened? We are total failures. This is never going to stick." And yet over time, through faithful persistence in those family devotions, you see light bulbs start to come on. It's not about what happens in the individual moment. It's about the total tonnage that accumulates over that period of time. But I don't think Paul just has in mind momentary periods of family devotions here. He also has the intentionality of being the types of parents who come along side your kids and help them to learn

and to thrive in life by seeing how the gospel intersects with what they experience in their own lives. And so part of what we want to do as parents is to cultivate teachable spirits in our hearts of our kids where teachability is more valuable in the home than talent. And we want them to have that type of humility that longs to grow and to develop. We see that playing out in any number of ways in the home.

But I want you to understand something about this church. Our church is committed to come alongside you in instruction in the Lord. Now we firmly believe that the primary responsibility for instruction in the home resides with you as parents. That God has put you there as mom and dad to invest in your children. And we are coming along side you to support you in that effort. So when you come here as we're able to reopen and once we're able to get our children's facilities back open and your kid goes to a gospel project group, or he's down there learning about Jesus in the preschool, or he's gathered up with Jeremy's crew on the second floor in the Student Ministry. We don't see that as gospel babysitting. We see that as intentional ways to come alongside your children to help them grown and to thrive in the Christian life. To supplement what you are already doing as parents so that you can help, we can help you empower your kids to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. But what I want you to notice is that encompassed in this whole passage, as Paul speaks about the family, he is doing it right on the tail of when he talked about the Christian marriage. And we saw at the end of Ephesians 5 when we finished that up towards the end of last year, that marriage is designed as a picture of the gospel. That in husband and wife, God is signaling Christ and church in a way that allows us to understand His design for the gospel more clearly in the same reality is true here in Ephesians 6. That the Bible is laying out for us that everyone of us are made in the image of God. But we are rebel children that reject our Heavenly Father. We resist obedience to Him. We regularly bring dishonor to Him and as a result of that, we are like the prodigal who goes away to a far country squandering our inheritance. Not seeking to live in a way that honors our God. And yet, what God did for us in Jesus is sent His one and only Son, the One who was already a part of His family, to come and die on the cross for us, paying the payment we deserved. Being raised from the dead to walk in newness of life so that we could become sons and daughters of the living God. That we could be reconciled to that family. So that we could be one in Christ, reconciled with God in our heavenly relationship so that we might be reconciled with one another in our earthly relationships.

Now I told you I've been watching those birds outside my window and some exciting things happened this week. Because on Friday I saw some extra activity amongst the mom and the dad. And the reason I quickly discerned is because their hatchlings were now out of the nest and ready to go into the big wide world for the first time. And they were darting all around. There was lots of bird calls going back and forth. And in that moment, I saw a number of things happen as these new birds took flight for the first time. The first one was so eager to jump off the roof that he was trying to fly to the roof above me and misjudged it and flew directly into the window right in front of me and had this awkward tumble to the ground. There were others that got I just right. The last one was the most resistant to go and one of the parents had to come back and it was spurring it on through what it was saying and it was modelling for it, where to fly, back and forth, showing it what to do, and keeping an eye on everything around them. And then that last one managed to successfully take flight. And as I looked at these parents of these new baby birds equipping their children to take wing and fly for the first time, I watched them motivate their kids. I watched them model for their kids. I watched them monitor for the

protection of their kids. And I couldn't help but think of Ephesians 6. In the way that Paul here is calling us to do the same thing while our children are at home. To equip them for the Christian life, to model for them what it looks like to live, and to motivate them to walk in a way that God calls them to. And the call of the gospel for us this morning as a church is that children obey our parents. We bring honor to them. And for parents to lead our families well so that we might have Christian homes that thrive in the way that Paul calls us to this morning.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we come before You a broken people whose sin has separated us from You. Lord, Your word warns us that those that reject You, that our Father is the devil, and that's true of every one of our hearts apart from Christ. But, Lord, we are grateful for the way that You've made a way for us in the gospel to experience newness of life. To experience reconciliation with You. To experience this calling to raise families that might honor You. And I'm praying for the homes in our church where there is brokenness that You might bring healing. Where there is difficulty that You might bring fruitfulness. And that each of our families might exhibit the peaceful fruit of righteousness that only comes through Christ being the center of our homes. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.